DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 287 156 CS 008 947

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TITLE Reading. English Language Arts Concept Paper Number 5.
INSTITUTION Oregon State Dept. of Education, Salem.
PUB DATE Sep 87
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; Phonics; *Reading Comprehension; *Reading Instruction; Reading Processes; Reading Research; Reading Skills; Reading Writing Relationship; Teaching Methods; Theory Practice Relationship; *Word Recognition
IDENTIFIERS Semantic Mapping

ABSTRACT

Noting that both comprehension and decoding are used by effective readers and that both processes should be taught, this concept paper focuses on effective strategies for reading instruction. Following an introduction, the first section focuses on the conclusions drawn about word identification by reading researchers. Subsections include information on structural analysis, context clues, and phonics, and offer a list of recommended word identification activities. The second section, a summary of research on reading comprehension, discusses schema theory, the teacher's role in comprehension theory, and metacognition. Also included is a list of recommended comprehension instruction activities, such as correlating reading and writing, discussing key concepts and vocabulary, using semantic mapping, and providing students with objectives. Finally, the conclusion re-emphasizes the use of strategies for teaching word identification and comprehension to foster increased reading ability and a love of reading. Three pages of references are included. (JC)

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Arts Concept Paper

Oregon Department of Education **Number 5**

Reading

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a cornerstone for a child's success in school and, indeed, throughout life. It is not surprising then that thousands of research articles are written on reading instruction each year and approximately 350 professional journals contain some articles on reading. In addition, there are special publications with the sole purpose of offering summaries of significant research in the field of reading. Because one study often contradicts another research study, it becomes a tremendous task to focus on the significant research or trends.

However, substantial advances in understanding the process of reading have been made in the last decade. Comprehension and word identification have generated the largest amount of study and concern. Teachers should know the important issues in these areas and use successful teaching practices based on research. Cooper (1986) states that the two main processes in reading are comprehension and decoding; the effective reader uses these processes simultaneously. Both can and must be taught.

Because of the tremendous amount of information available, important issues concerning the interrelatedness of reading and the other communication skills are discussed in another concept paper on integrating the English language arts. Beginning literacy concerns are addressed in the Department of Education publication *Kindergarten Issues: A Position Paper*. Additional concept papers will be forthcoming on issues related to vocabulary development, study skills, and mass media.

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WORD IDENTIFICATION RESEARCH SUMMARY

Instruction in word identification usually centers around structural analysis, context clues, and phonics. Research on how these skills contribute to reading comprehension is still needed. Some conclusions about the effectiveness of these three skills in identifying words can be made.

Structural Analysis

Structural analysis involves identification of the parts of words. It often involves instruction in identification of roots, affixes, compounds, hyphenated forms, inflected and derived endings, contractions, and sometimes syllabication. "Based on the absence of relevant research in the area of structural analysis, there is little empirical evidence that supports the effectiveness of teaching syllabication or structure skills involving affixes or inflections. This does not mean that structural analysis is not a potentially powerful word-identification strategy, but rather, it simply demonstrates once again that all too frequently educational practice is not founded on educational research" (Johnson and Baumann, in Pearson, 1984).

Context Clues

In this word-identification strategy, readers attempt to determine the pronunciation and meaning of an unknown word by the way it is used in a sentence or paragraph. Context clues include pictorial and graphic aides; typographical clues such as quotation marks, parentheses, and definitional footnotes; and linguistic clues provided by the syntactic (position in the sentence) clues and semantic clues (meaning of other words). "There is a reasonably firm

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psychological base for a reader's use of contextual aids, and the subsequent teaching of these skills in word-identification instruction" (Johnson and Baumann, in Pearson, 1984). Sternberg, Powell, and Kaye (in press) report research that supports instruction in the use of a combination of contextual and structural analysis skills (prefix, stem, and suffix).

Phonics

Becoming a Nation of Readers, the federally funded report by the Commission on Reading, addresses the phonics controversy clearly: "The issue is no longer, as it was several decades ago, whether children should be taught phonics . . . but . . . how it should be done" (Anderson and others, 1985). There are essentially two approaches to phonics instruction — explicit phonics and implicit phonics. The explicit approach presents sounds associated with letters in isolation and then blends them to form words, whereas in the implicit approach the sound associated with a letter is never presented in isolation. The implicit approach has the teacher provide the student with a group of words that have the same sound with the intent of having the student generalize that sound to other words with the same letter.

A variation of the implicit approach to reading instruction is called "whole language." In this method, students are to experience and respond to selections as a whole, then study sentences, words, and letters from the context of the selection. Studies of whole language approaches in the United States have produced inconsistent results. The average result is indifferent when compared to more typical approaches (Anderson and others, 1985).

There are limitations to both approaches and, thus, studies have recommended a combination.

> ***"The issue is no longer, as it was several decades ago, whether children should be taught phonics . . . but . . . how it should be done."***

Becoming a Nation of Readers (Anderson and others, 1985) states, ". . . research provides insufficient justification for strict adherence to either overall philosophy. Probably the best strategy would draw from both approaches." The report goes on to explain the reasons for phonics instruction.

In summary, the purpose of phonics is to teach children the alphabetic principle. The goal is for this to become an operating principle so that young readers consistently use information about the

> ***"Each encounter with a reading selection should serve the dual goals of advancing children's skill at word identification and helping them to understand that reading is a process not simply of word recognition, but one of bringing ideas to mind."***

relationship between letters and sounds and letters and meanings to assist in the identification of known words and to independently figure out unfamiliar words. Research evidence tends to favor explicit phonics. However, the "ideal" phonics program would probably incorporate features from implicit phonics as well.

Groff (1986) supports this approach: "Unless future research tells us otherwise, there also seems no hazard in teachers' use of a combination of explicit and implicit instruction."

Recommended Word Identification Activities

- Word identification should be taught in conjunction with meaning. Phonics instruction can hinder or divert a child from comprehension (Goodman, 1979). *Becoming A Nation of Readers* recommends that "no matter how children are introduced to words, very early in the program they should have experience with reading these words in meaningful texts" (Anderson and others, 1985). The report further discusses the importance of having letter-sound relationships "lavishly illustrated with words" to provide concrete examples for what might be confusing abstract rules for students. Uniting the teaching of phonics and comprehension is recommended. "Each encounter with a reading selection should serve the dual goals of advancing children's skill at word identification

and helping them to understand that reading is a process not simply of word recognition, but one of bringing ideas to mind" (Anderson and others, 1985).

Coordinating phonics with comprehension does not require a traditional sequence for introducing letter-sound relationships because "children do not require this much regularity to master the alphabetic principle" (Anderson and others, 1985). It is felt that more interesting texts can be written if a rigid order of introduction is not required. A typical rigid order calls for all consonants, then short vowels and long vowels, etc., to be presented in sequence with the next skill not presented until the child succeeds with the previous step. Research is inconclusive about which, if any, order of presentation of skills is most effective.

In a follow-up document titled, *Becoming a Nation of Readers: Implications for Teachers* (Binckley and others, 1987), three methods are listed to teach phonics in conjunction with meaning:

A. Reading pattern books or predictable books
B. Assisted reading
C. Writing with invented spelling

The pattern books provide the students with opportunities to predict and recognize patterns and also reinforces the letter-sound correspondences as word families are used. Assisted reading has the teacher provide the reading model first and then the students repeat the word, phrase, or sentence. This provides the student with successful practice with the text. Writing with invented spelling provides the students with opportunities to practice the phonetic principles being taught and does not have a negative effect on spelling skills.

- Blending sounds is a worthwhile activity. Research shows that when teachers spend more than average amounts of time in instruction on blending sounds, students produce larger than average gains on reading achievement tests (Anderson and others, 1985).

- Students should be taught to make inferences about the pronunciation of a word once they have sounded it out. "In any event, a vital part of phonics teaching, one noticeably missing at present, must be to have children practice making inferences about the pronunciations of words after hearing approximate pronunciations of them gained from the application of phonics rules. Measures of phonics achievement should also take this factor into account" (Groff, 1986).

- Use of context clues should be taught. Johnson and Baumann (in Pearson, 1984) state that research supports teaching students to use the structure of the language and the meanings of surrounding words and sentences to identify unknown words. More research is needed to determine the best methodology for instruction.

"In too many instances, children do endless drill exercises on sound symbol relationships they already know."

- Only the most important and regular letter to sound relationships should be taught. Teach these relationships as early in the program as

possible and to children who do not already know them. In too many instances, children do endless drill exercises on sound symbol relationships they already know (Anderson and others, 1985).

- Use of sources to verify pronunciation should be taught. "Glossaries, dictionaries, and encyclopedias are good sources to verify pronunciation or meaning of words" (Robinson and Good, 1987). Using these sources allows students to become more independent readers.

Word Identification Summary

Research has shown that:

- Word identification instruction is an essential part of a reading program.
- Blending of sounds needs to be taught.
- Phonics instruction and meaning need to be linked.
- Children need to learn to infer correct pronunciations from letter-sound approximations.
- Use of context to identify words should be taught.
- Use of references to verify words is an important skill.

READING COMPREHENSION RESEARCH SUMMARY

"Prior to 1970, our view of the comprehension process was driven by our fixation upon the text as an object of study. Comprehension was viewed as some degree of 'approximation' to the text read. And, if we had any notion that readers build mental models as they read, then our standard for what a mental model should look like was the text itself" (Pearson, 1985).

Over the last 10 years, there has been a tremendous increase in the amount of research done in the area of reading comprehension. Research from the 1970's to the present shows instruction in reading comprehension to be influenced by three factors.

1. **Schema Theory**. Schema refers to the interaction between the reader and the text through which the reader constructs meaning

(Anderson and Pearson, in Pearson, 1984). Schema theory proposes that no text is entirely self-explanatory but must rely on the reader to construct meaning based on the reader's knowledge of the subject and the ability to integrate the new information with prior knowledge. Developing the background of knowledge and the key vocabulary for a reading selection should be viewed as the backbone or foundation of the reading comprehension program (Cooper, 1986).

2. **The Teacher's Role in Comprehension Instruction**. Dolores Durkin's research in 1978-79 found that only one percent of instructional time was spent on teaching comprehension. A second study of reading manuals found that much of what was provided were questions to be asked to assess comprehension. There was little evidence of the direct teaching of comprehension within the classrooms or in the manuals. Rosenshine and Stevens (in Pearson, 1984) noted in their study that teachers have not developed specific methods for demonstrating to students the

comprehension strategies called for by higher level questions.

3. **Metacognition**. The reader's role or metacognition refers to the knowledge and control which the reader has over his/her own thinking and learning activities (Brown, 1980). "When teaching metacognition in relation to reading comprehension, the teacher's objective is to help students become aware of the skills and processes of comprehension that they need in order to read and understand a specific text selection" (Cooper, 1986). McNeil (1984) states that metacognition processes in reading include the recognition of one's strengths and weaknesses in comprehending, knowing the importance of matching a comprehension

"Explicit instruction in comprehending a variety of types of materials is necessary."

task with an appropriate reading strategy, being aware whether one has or has not understood the text, and knowing what to do to correct failure to comprehend.

Recommended Comprehension Instruction Activities

Explicit instruction in comprehending a variety of types of materials is necessary. Comprehension instruction can be divided into three phases within a reading lesson: (1) prereading, (2) during reading, and (3) post-reading or follow-up. The following are effective reading comprehension activities that are reflective of research on: (1) schema theory, (2) the teacher's role, (3) the reader's role or metacognition, and (4) vocabulary development.

1. **Prereading Instructional Activities**. The prereading activities should be designed to build and activate the reader's background knowledge. "The role of the teacher in teaching comprehension is to help the reader activate prior experiences in order to develop the background or schema for comprehending a particular selection" (Cooper, 1986).

   - Discussing a written list of key concepts and vocabulary needed to understand the text prior to reading "bridges the gap between what the reader already knows and what the reader needs to know before he/she can meaningfully learn the task at hand" (Ausubel, 1968). For example, if students are to read a selection about an archaeologist, the concepts could be statements about the function of archaeology and the types of tools used.

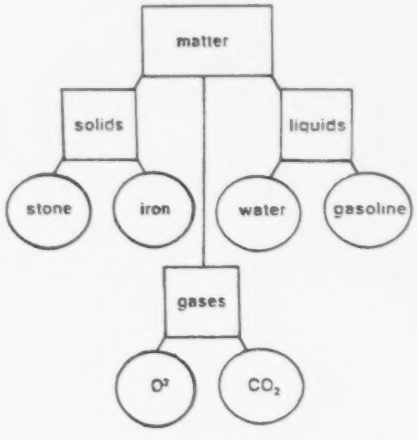
     Research on this technique using key concepts called "advanced organizers" (Ausubel, 1968; Dean-Guilford, 1981; Kelleher, 1982; Moore and Readence, 1980) shows that this strategy has a positive effect on learning. The research points out that it works best for expository material and is most effective for students with higher verbal ability. Ausubel (1968) states that the information to be included in the organizer depends on the text and the background knowledge of the student. The most important component is the discussion. Advanced organizers fill in the gap between what a student knows and needs to know to comprehend a new text.

   - The use of story previews provides a way for the teacher to activate background knowledge and provide an attention-focusing device before the students read a narrative selection. The story preview is a statement by the teacher written or given orally that summarizes some of the main ideas that will appear in a selection and then oftentimes ends with a question to help direct the reading. The story preview is most effective with narrative material

and has favorable results for both high and low ability students from various communities and grade levels (Graves and Palmer, 1981; Graves, Cooke, and

LaBerge, 1983; Hood, 1981; and Graves and Cooke, 1980). The story previews are especially effective with stories that are difficult for students because they address unfamiliar vocabulary and experiences.

- The use of webbing and semantic mapping helps the reader to activate existing schemata related to a particular topic and to develop a specific schema for a selection that will be read. Webbing and semantic mapping, also called graphic organizers, provide the reader with a concrete image of how topics and ideas are related (Cooper, 1986). Lines are drawn between words or ideas to show their relationships. The example below illustrates a semantic map for some science concepts.



The graphic organizers can also be used during and after text reading to help enhance comprehension. The graphic organizers help students to engage their prior background knowledge about a subject and to relate it to new information.

- Providing students with objectives before they read has proven to be an effective activity for enhancing comprehension. The objectives focus the students' learning on key concepts and decrease the amount of incidental learning. Focusing on objectives, which has a positive effect on targeted information and a negative effect on incidental learning, is designed to be used with expository texts (Tierney and Cunningham, in Pearson, 1984).

- Using pretests and prequestions has proven effective if the questions specifically reflect what the teacher wants

"Since vocabulary knowledge has such an influence on a reader's comprehension, effective vocabulary lessons are particularly important."

the students to learn. Pretests and prequestions decrease the amount of incidental learning in the same way that providing the students with objectives before a reading does. The questions should reflect the most important points in the text. It is not effective to use prequestions if the desired end result is an overall understanding of the material (Tierney and Cunningham, in Pearson, 1984).

- Vocabulary-building activities that are effective involve using words in context, classifying words, and associating unknown words with known words. Practices for teaching vocabulary that have little or no value are looking words up in the dictionary, studying words in isolation, and writing new vocabulary words in sentences. Since vocabulary knowledge has such an influence on a reader's comprehension, effective vocabulary lessons are particularly important.

2. **During Reading Instructional Activities**

The activities during reading are referred to as guided-reading activities. These activities take place during the time the student is reading and are intended to enhance comprehension. The activities should foster ongoing comprehension.

"Questions requiring higher level thinking skills will cause students to read differently than those focusing only on facts."

- Providing students with questions during reading is a well-used instructional practice employed by teachers to help guide the readers through a text. Research shows that it is an effective means to improve comprehension of factual information and

application questions (Watts and Anderson, 1971; Rothkopt, 1972). Questions should follow the sequence of the selection. The answers to all the

questions should provide a summary of the text. Students learn to anticipate the type of thinking that the teacher's questions demand. Questions requiring higher level thinking skills will cause students to read differently than those focusing only on facts.

- Monitoring comprehension is described by Cooper (1986) as a developmental task. He states that beginning readers seem to be less aware of their lack of understanding when reading and less able to explain why they do not understand. Studies by Palincscar and Brown (1984) indicate that monitoring comprehension can be taught.

  Cooper (1986) outlined a four-step approach to comprehension monitoring consisting of:

  (1) summarizing
  (2) clarifying
  (3) questioning
  (4) predicting

  The student, in Step 1, summarizes by stopping during reading and silently asking, "Is this clear to me?" If it is not clear, then the student goes to Step 2, clarification. The student clarifies by rereading or discussing the parts that are unclear. In Step 3 the student silently asks the questions a teacher might ask in a discussion or test. In the last step the student predicts what might happen next in the text.

  The teacher models this strategy with the students taking them through every step. The teacher and students then practice this strategy by having the student take the part of the teacher and lead others through the four steps. This modeling is done to help students learn to monitor their own comprehension when they are reading alone. This approach was a result of research by Robinson (1962) and his SQ3R method consisting of survey, question, read, recall, and review.

- Using oral reading as a means to improve reading comprehension has limited research but is a practice that is often used by teachers. The use of oral reading in instruction must be addressed because it oftentimes takes up a major portion of instructional time. One study, cited in *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, found that low-ability first graders spent 90 percent of their instructional time reading aloud, while high-ability first graders spent 40 percent of their instructional time reading aloud (Anderson and others, 1985). "While children do read aloud frequently, one can find little evidence in the literature that instruction in effective oral reading behavior is actually offered" (Allington in Pearson, 1984).

"Correlating selected reading and writing activities has a positive impact on student performance in both areas."

Becoming a Nation of Readers stresses the importance of children reading a selection silently before reading it aloud. The report also states that research has not been conclusive about oral reading as an effective method to improve comprehension. Also no studies have been conducted addressing the long-term effect of oral reading on attitudes about the act of reading. Oral reading as a diagnostic tool has been well documented.

- Correlating selected reading and writing activities has a positive impact on student performance in both areas (Tierney and Leys, 1984). Some examples of effective activities are writing summaries or completing a story frame where a series of

spaces is hooked together by transition words. Story frames usually follow a single thought or aspect of a narrative selection, such as a character, a setting, or the development of the plot. The example below illustrates one type of story frame.

Plot Frame
This story begins when_____.
Next_____.
Then_____.
The story ends when_____.

- Study guides are an effective way to direct students' attention to the important information in the text. A well-designed guide includes questions that focus the students' reading, some vocabulary practice and/or extension activities, and activities that require students to think critically (Cooper, 1986).

3. **Follow-Up or Post-Reading Activities**

Follow-up instructional activities should enhance the comprehension for the student by extending meaning beyond the text.

- Feedback to students evaluating their reading activities increases student learning (Gagne', 1978; Kulhavy, 1977; La Porte and Voss, 1975). When students answer questions based on what they have read, teachers usually let them know whether these answers are correct. Verbal feedback is most effective (Barringer and Gholson, 1975). Corrective feedback following incorrect answers had the most significant influence on student learning (Kulhavy, 1977; La Porte and Voss, 1975). Kulhavy (1977) further noted that feedback mattered little if the reading material was too difficult for the students.

- Group and whole class discussions may increase comprehension if structured correctly. Research has shown mixed results in the use of group discussions to improve comprehension. Estes (1970) showed no direct benefits to comprehension using discussion following a reading. A study by Vacca (1977) showed group discussions to be beneficial. The variable which affects the impact of group discussions seems to be the way it is conducted and its relationship to a large post-reading activity or to the use of a study guide that provides a purpose or focus for the discussion. Open-ended discussions with no specific objective for expository material seem to have no benefits for improved comprehension.

- Identifying the task demands of questions following a reading is beneficial to comprehension. A study by Raphael and Pearson (1982) and another study by Raphael (1982) explored the teaching of a strategy intended to make readers more aware of what is required of them to answer questions accompanying story selections. Students from fourth, sixth, and eighth grades were taught to differentiate between questions which required them to locate the answer in the text and questions that involved using their own background knowledge to answer the question.

Students having the training surpassed the other students in the quality of responses to questions. This suggests it is an effective strategy to teach students about the kinds of tasks questions might demand.

- The use of summarizing appears to be an effective strategy to improve comprehension if the student knows how to summarize. Day (1980), found that providing students with specific rules for summarizing influenced the students' ability to detect main ideas and delete trivial information. Also, the level of writing ability influenced the use of summarizing. Students with writing problems needed more training. A study by Cunningham (1982) involved fourth-grade students using a systematic procedure for developing summaries which was successful for the students. It appears that when students have the ability to summarize what they read, their comprehension is improved. Most important is the need to teach the skill of summarizing prior to assigning a written summary.

Reading Comprehension Summary

Research shows that comprehension strategies can be and need to be taught and that individuals bring their own prior knowledge to each text.

> ***"Teachers should make clear to the students the purposes for reading a selection, ask relevant questions, and teach the skills necessary for students to monitor their own comprehension."***

Teachers need to consider the students' knowledge of a concept when planning the prereading activities necessary for optimum reading.

- Teachers should make clear to the students the purposes for reading a selection, ask relevant questions, and teach the skills necessary for students to monitor their own comprehension.
- Students need to know the tasks required for comprehending narrative selections and those needed for expository material.
- Particular emphasis should be given to developing higher level thinking skills.
- Predicting what might come next in the text is effective.
- Study guides are especially helpful for focusing attention on the important aspects of a selection.
- Teachers should give feedback to students on how well they have comprehended the text.
- Reading should be followed by assignments like summarizing and writing activities that expand or use the information.
- Discussions following the reading activity should be focused on a particular purpose or aspect of the selection.

CONCLUSION

Sufficient research findings support the use of specific strategies for teaching word identification and reading comprehension. Teachers should incorporate such well-researched strategies into their instructional program. One particular advantage to being aware of current research is to prevent the temptation to latch onto the latest untested fad or trend.

The influence that classroom teachers have in developing life-long readers should not be underestimated. Teachers provide models of skillful reading when they read aloud to children. Literacy can be promoted through the use of a variety of interesting, readable materials and the value of reading can be demonstrated by providing adequate time during the day for different reading activities.

Effective reading programs incorporate clearly oriented goals, carefully selected materials, and instructional strategies which reflect the best of current knowledge based on research. As students incorporate skillful word identification strategies with effective comprehension techniques, both reading ability and love of reading will flourish.

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September 1987

Verne A. Duncan
State Superintendent
of Public Instruction